United Nations A/C.1/59/PV.1

General Assembly
Fifty-ninth session

Official Records

First Committee
1st meeting
Thursday, 30 September 2004, 3 p.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. De Alba ..... (Mexico)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): To all participants in the deliberations of the First Committee at the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, I extend a warm welcome. I am committed to working with you intensively as we discharge our common responsibilities.

It is an honour and a privilege for my country, and for me personally, to have been elected to preside over this important body. I thank all delegations for their confidence in me. With your support, fellow members, I hope to be worthy of your trust in the way I guide the Committee as it carries out its challenging tasks.

I shall rely on your spirit of cooperation and flexibility. I shall also rely on the support of my colleagues in the Bureau, who were elected in June: the three Vice-Chairpersons — Ms. Dziunik Aghajanian of Armenia, Mr. Alon Bar of Israel and Mr. Sylvester Ekundayo Rowe of Sierra Leone — and the Rapporteur, Mr. Mohamed Ali Saleh Alnajar of Yemen. I am certain that their extensive experience and diplomatic skill will ease the task of guiding the Committee's work in the weeks ahead.

I am confident also that the Committee will benefit greatly from the unstinting support and valuable experience of Mr. Nobuyasu Abe, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, of Mr. Chen Jian, Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, and of Ms. Cheryl Stoute, Secretary of the First Committee, and her colleagues in the Committee secretariat. I am certain that their in-depth knowledge of the issues before the Committee will be a significant contribution to the success of our work.

Organization of work

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): We turn now to the organization of the work of the First Committee at the fifty-ninth session. Here, I draw the attention of members to document A/C.1/59/1, letter dated 17 September 2004 addressed to me by the President of the General Assembly, informing me that at its 2nd plenary meeting the Assembly decided to allocate 16 disarmament and related international security agenda items to the First Committee for its consideration.

Before I proceed to give a more detailed account of the programme of work and timetable that are being proposed in document A/C.1/59/CRP.1, I would like to indicate that that document has been prepared in keeping with previous practice and taking into account a number of initiatives proposed over the past several years, including General Assembly decision 52/416 B, on the rationalization of the work of the First Committee. In that connection, account was taken also of paragraph 36 of the annex to resolution 51/241, which reads as follows:

> "The First Committee and the Fourth Committee shall not meet simultaneously and may

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consider meeting in a sequential manner during the regular session of the General Assembly."

In accordance with established practice, the First Committee will commences its substantive work on Monday, 4 October 2004. Members will recall that, also under Assembly decision 52/416 B, it was agreed that the First Committee should make every effort to conduct and conclude its substantive work with the most efficient use of time and resources in no less than 30 meetings and in a time frame not exceeding five weeks. In view of the above, I shall make every effort — of course, with the assistance and the cooperation of members — to conclude the work of the Committee, as recommended by the General Committee, by Friday, 5 November 2004.

Thus, the First Committee's substantive session will run from Monday, 4 October, to Friday, 5 November, giving the Committee a maximum of 26 meetings to consider the agenda items allocated to it by the General Assembly. Here, I would like to point out that last year too the Committee had at its disposal a total of 26 meetings, of which it utilized 23. I therefore believe that if we continue to make a concerted attempt to utilize our resources in an effective and productive manner, we can again accomplish our tasks without any undue difficulties.

As at previous sessions, the consideration of the items allocated to the First Committee will proceed in three phases. That is reflected in the proposed programme of work and timetable.

The first phase — general debate on all items allocated to the Committee — will last a maximum of two weeks, from 4 to 15 October, for a maximum total of 10 meetings. The list of speakers for that phase is open, and I know that a number of delegations have already placed their names on the list. I invite others to do the same as soon as possible.

As members know, I requested the Secretariat to send to all delegations a note from me relating to certain aspects of the organization of the Committee's work. In that note, I stated that — based on Member States' responses to the Secretary-General's request for their views on improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee, in accordance with resolution 58/41, as compiled in document A/59/132 and its addenda, as well as on resolutions 58/126 and 58/316, on revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, and also taking into account the consultations held by last year's Chairman, Ambassador Sareva — it is my intention to introduce some changes to continue to improve the function of the Committee. I believe that the best way to proceed with the reform of the Committee is to gradually implement changes on which there is a convergence of views.

I wish therefore to propose the following procedural changes for the general debate phase. The first is to set a time-limit on statements in the general debate of five minutes per delegation, or 10 minutes for statements made on behalf of regional groups or other groups of delegations. The second is to close the list of speakers on 6 October, the third day of the debate. The third is to establish a rolling list of speakers to make better use of the time available to the Committee. Without prejudging the duration of the general debate, those three measures should enable the Committee to implement the General Assembly's decision with respect to utilizing or expanding the use of the practice of interactive debates.

If those proposals are accepted, I foresee that the Committee would have at least three meetings for an interactive debate, which could be devoted: to the question of the implementation of the resolutions and decisions adopted by the First Committee; to continued consideration of proposals on the improving the effectiveness of our working methods; and to drawing conclusions on measures to improve the Committee's effectiveness and efficiency, including recommendations to be submitted to the General Assembly, taking account of deliberations held at the two aforementioned sessions, and in conformity with resolution 58/316.

I hope that delegations will support those measures.

Here, in connection with the list of speakers, let me remind members that a rolling list would mean that they should be prepared to possibly make their statements sooner than originally planned. For delegations not in a position to speak during the first week of general debate, I will try to be flexible and try to accommodate them early in the second week of general debate, preferably Monday or Tuesday. I recall once again that the list will be closed on Wednesday, 6 October, at 6 p.m., and that delegations are requested, to the extent possible, to kindly limit their statements to five minutes for those speaking in their national capacities and to 10 minutes for those speaking on behalf of a number of delegations.

It is my intention, at the end of the first week of our debate, to circulate a number of recommendations related to the conduct of the interactive meetings I mentioned earlier.

The next phase of the Committee's work will be the thematic discussion of agenda items, as well as the introduction and consideration of all draft resolutions and decisions submitted under all disarmament and related international security agenda items. That phase will cover the period from Monday, 18 October, to Friday, 22 October; a minimum of six meetings will be allocated for that purpose.

I wish to inform members of the Committee that, in order to have a structured discussion and to fully utilize conference facilities, after necessary consultations I will prepare an indicative timetable based on the established practice of the Committee for the second phase of its work. I will also offer new proposals, including with respect to inviting experts to introduce the themes and to encouraging an interactive discussion. The indicative paper will be made available to members as soon as possible, and certainly no later than next Friday. I propose also to find formulas allowing greater participation by non-governmental organizations in the Committee's work; I shall continue to hold consultations to that end.

In order to facilitate the Committee's work and grant sufficient time to delegations for consultations, as well as to give enough time to the Secretariat to process draft resolutions in all six official languages, the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions and decisions will be Monday, 11 October, at 6 p.m. I appeal to all delegations to adhere strictly to that deadline.

I also encourage members to submit their draft resolutions and decisions as early as possible, in order to enable delegations to seek the necessary instructions from their capitals and to carry out adequate consultations on them, so as to ensure that the texts finally adopted reflect the greatest possible degree of consensus. The early submission of draft resolutions will also give members of the Committee an opportunity to comment on them during the second phase of our work, which is actually intended for that purpose.

Furthermore, it is imperative that delegations submit those draft resolutions that could entail programme budget implications as early as possible to give the Secretariat sufficient time to prepare the necessary programme budget implications. That would also enable the Committee to take action upon them with a view to meeting the mandatory deadline required for their submission to the Fifth Committee. In that regard, I would like to remind delegations that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee need adequate time to review the programme budget implications of draft resolutions before the latter can be acted upon by the Assembly.

Finally, the third and last phase of the Committee's work — action on all draft resolutions and decisions — will take place from 25 October to 5 November: a total of 10 meetings. Last year the Committee completed its action on all draft resolutions and decisions — of which there were 46 and 7, respectively — in only seven meetings. I hope that a similar result will be possible this year.

It is my intention to retain the voting procedure involving the grouping of draft resolutions by clusters during this session. I shall in due course present specific proposals concerning this matter.

I firmly believe that, based on the proposed programme of work and timetable that is now before members, the Committee will be able to efficiently consider all the agenda items allocated to it within the available time, and to successfully conclude its work by Friday, 5 November 2004.

I should like to conclude by reminding delegations of the need to maintain the requisite degree of flexibility in the process of implementing the proposed programme of work and timetable so that we can make maximal use of the resources allocated to the Committee.

I call on the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Gala López (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Let me first of all express our satisfaction, Sir, at seeing you presiding over the work of the First Committee at this session. Would this be the proper time to comment on your note setting out a number of procedural proposals?

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Cuba is, of course, free to make comments now, but I would observe that the note I circulated contained mere recommendations by the Chairman, and that at present the Committee is limiting itself to approval of the documents before it relating to its programme of work.

That said, I am perfectly willing to listen to comments or answer questions on any aspect of the recommendations of the Chairman.

Mr. Gala López (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation has no problem with the proposed programme of work and timetable, but we would like to make a brief comment on the proposals circulated in the recent note of the Chairman.

My delegation notes, Mr. Chairman, that you have proposed a five-minute time-limit on national statements. With all due respect, and in a constructive spirit, I have to say that this is of concern to us. We hope that the Chair would implement such a time-limit with due flexibility. In our view, a time-limit on national statements could greatly reduce the opportunity for delegations, especially small delegations, to set out their substantive positions: it is in the general debate that such delegations are able to do this without any pressure. It is well known that during the thematic discussion delegations are often obliged to participate in parallel informal negotiations: that is why we are concerned about setting a rigid five-minute time-limit for delegations speaking in their national capacity. Here, flexibility would be useful if a delegation needs a little additional time to make its contribution to the general debate.

We understand, Sir, that you are seeking to make progress on measures that could improve our working methods and that could enjoy a degree of consensus. But we would like such measures, with a substantive impact on the Committee's working methods, to be properly negotiated among members of the Committee for subsequent adoption.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, let me assure the representative of Cuba that the Chair will display the greatest flexibility with respect to statements by any delegation, large or small, while taking into account what he just said with respect to smaller delegations. At the same time, however, it is important for us to use the thematic phase for detailed discussion of the items on our agenda. That is not the Chairman's idea: I drew it from comments on revitalization of the Committee that members have formally transmitted to the Secretary-General with the purpose of fostering a more interactive dialogue. In giving priority to the thematic phase, we will give all delegations ample opportunity to state their views.

I also believe, in line with suggestions made during the reform process, that delegations should consider making brief five-minute statements and circulating longer texts or complementary documents in written form. From the Chairman's standpoint, reducing the time is not intended in any way to limit delegations' ability to state their views on any item on our agenda. The intention is to gain sharper focus on the items under consideration and to try as much as possible to encourage interactive dialogue and a more structured consideration of our items.

Let me take advantage of the representative of Cuba's question by noting that, from the Chairman's point of view, the priority should be to create a climate far more conducive to dialogue and thus far more conducive to identifying ways of enabling us to make progress in our work and, above all, to attain our objectives. I believe that the Committee has many important tasks before it; we must find ways of overcoming the enormous difficulties raised in recent years with respect to issues of disarmament and international security.

I would ask the Cuban delegation, having received assurances that there will be flexibility and that no statement will be interrupted, to accept the Chairman's request that delegations be as brief as possible in the general debate and to participate as actively as possible in the thematic phase.

Mr. Gala López (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Sir, for your clarification and for your interpretation of the recommendation. We were pleased to hear that the time-limit is merely indicative, and that no delegation will be interrupted during the general debate if it requires more time to set out its position.

One matter of concern is that, although we could distribute the texts of lengthier statements, we know that these would not appear in the verbatim records of the First Committee, which contain only what is said in the meetings.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful to the representative of Cuba for his flexibility and his understanding. I shall make inquiries about whether written presentations can be reflected in full in the records of the Committee. Otherwise, it would be problematic to encourage this more rational use of our time. I personally believe that the representative of Cuba has raised a valid point that deserves

consideration. I will soon have additional information on this matter, and we can discuss it at that point.

On that understanding, may I take it that the proposed draft programme of work and timetable (A/C.1/59/CRP.1) meets with the approval of the Committee?

It was so decided.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I should now like to draw the Committee's attention to the relevant rules and recommendations of the General Assembly affecting the work of the Main Committees, including those contained in decision 34/401, in particular the provisions dealing with explanations of vote, rights of reply and budgetary and financial questions, which I intend to apply with the cooperation and assistance of all members of the First Committee.

In order to make full use of the time and facilities available to the Committee, I intend — again, with the cooperation and support of members — to open the meetings of the Committee promptly at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., and to close the meetings at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. sharp, respectively.

In that regard, I appeal to all speakers, especially to the first three speakers at a given meeting, to make every effort to be present in the Conference Room on time. I also urge all other members of the Committee to kindly attend the meetings of the Committee on time in person or to have a representative of their delegations present. I wish to emphasize the importance of punctuality in the interest of maximizing the efficiency of our work and achieving economies for the Organization.

On a related matter, delegations should note that the General Committee recommended to the General Assembly that during the final two weeks of Ramadan, from 1 to 11 November 2004, the hours of plenary meetings and meetings of the Main Committees should be from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and from 2.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. at the latest.

It is my intention to convene meetings of the Committee when a sufficient number of speakers are inscribed on the list so that we can utilize the time and resources available to us in the most effective manner possible and obviate the need to adjourn our meetings early for lack of speakers.

I need not remind members that the resources allocated to a meeting that is cancelled in good time may be released for other meetings held within or outside the framework of the First Committee. I continue to stress this because at the fifty-eighth session, the First Committee utilized 78 per cent of its allocated conference resources and lost 18 hours and 40 minutes owing to the late start and/or early adjournment of meetings. That is below the benchmark of 80 per cent. I sincerely hope that all delegations will make a special effort to help the Chair to begin meetings on time and to improve the record of utilization of the conference facilities available to the Committee.

I should also like to draw the Committee's attention to agenda item 20, entitled "Election of the officers of the Main Committees", in particular rule 99, paragraph (a), of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, which, as amended by resolution 56/509 of 8 July 2002, reads as follows:

> "All the Main Committees shall, at least three months before the opening of the session, elect a Chairman. Elections of the other officers provided for in rule 103 shall be held at the latest by the end of the first week of the session."

In view of the foregoing, I should like to propose that the First Committee, in accordance with that resolution, consider this item in June 2005, some three months before the opening of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Committee wishes to proceed accordingly.

It was so decided.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): Regarding the submission of draft resolutions, I wish to draw the Committee's attention to paragraph 30 of document A/59/250, dated 15 September 2004, entitled "Organization of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items". The paragraph reads as follows:

> "The General Committee took note and decided to bring to the attention of the General Assembly that the Secretary-General encourages Member States to transmit all draft resolutions and decisions in electronic form as well as on paper and that the submitters are responsible for ensuring that the electronic and paper versions of the draft resolutions and decisions are identical in content."

In that connection, I urge those Member States wishing to submit draft resolutions or decisions to the Committee to kindly observe the following procedure. For submission of draft resolutions that are based on pre-existing resolutions, the officially issued version — the A/RES document issued on the Official Document System (ODS) — must be used as the base text, with all new text and changes to the old text indicated clearly in boldface. Similarly, for revised draft resolutions — for example "L" documents with a "Rev" suffix — the original draft resolution issued on ODS must be used as the base text, with all revisions indicated clearly in boldface.

Delegations are requested to follow the procedures and to submit both the hard copy of the final text and a diskette to the secretariat for processing of the document. Those delegations wishing to submit a draft resolution or decision are encouraged to contact the secretariat of the Committee for further information and assistance. To facilitate the process, the secretariat of the Committee will provide pre-existing resolutions for delegations in the form of a kit, both in hard copy and in electronic form, and it has expressed its readiness to assist delegations in that respect.

Finally, I should like to appeal to all delegations to switch off their cellular telephones or put them into silent mode during the proceedings of the Committee. As we all know, the ringing of telephones interferes with the audio system and unquestionably disrupts the meeting.

At this stage, I wish to give the floor to the Secretary of the First Committee to inform the Committee of certain matters pertaining to the proceedings of the Committee.

Ms. Stoute (Secretary of the Committee): The information I have continues on from what the Chairman has just said. I would like to inform delegations that the secretariat is ready to assist them with draft resolutions. As the Chairman mentioned, we are preparing kits containing hard copies of last year's or other previous years' resolutions as adopted by the General Assembly, and a diskette with an electronic file containing the same resolutions in First Committee draft-resolution format. Delegations are encouraged to use that format for the submission of draft resolutions and to indicate changes and new text in the electronic file. The secretariat will allocate symbols to all draft resolution and draft decisions in the order in which they are received. Delegations are encouraged to use electronic mail for the submission of draft resolutions and other communications to the secretariat.

My colleague Mr. Sergei Cherniavsky will provide members with his e-mail address to facilitate transmission. He is a focal point and will be issuing all draft resolutions and decisions.

I have been asked to draw the attention of members to some of the documents that have been issued; these include A/C.1/59/INF/1, "Documents of the First Committee", and A/C.1/59/1, "Allocation of agenda items to the First Committee". Document A/C.1/59/3, containing the list of delegations, which I know is important to members, will be issued on 11 October.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on the representative of the United States.

Mr. Luaces (United States of America): I wish to make a couple of administrative announcements. First, following on from conversations we had in the Conference Room before the convening of this meeting, I wanted to confirm that our delegation does in fact intend to introduce a draft resolution this year to follow up on the draft resolution that became resolution 58/41. We view the draft text, which we hope will be available early next week, as the potential vehicle for all delegations to use in order to meet the requirements that the General Assembly has imposed on all the Main Committees under resolution 58/316 — and, of course, to follow up on resolution 58/41.

Here, we wish briefly to call the attention of members to the note verbale that the United States submitted in response to resolution 58/41, which can be found in document A/59/132/Add.2. There is one error in that document which does not appear either in the note circulated by the United States Mission to all United Nations missions in New York or in the copies of the note verbale delivered in capitals. In the Secretariat version, one item was omitted from cluster 7: agenda item 67 (dd), "Convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament". We have requested the Secretariat to issue a one-page corrigendum to make it clear that, from our perspective, in the proposed clusters, that item would belong under "Disarmament machinery" — assuming that whatever it is that the Committee does within the next five weeks includes a cluster on disarmament machinery.

In that regard, we would like also to call the attention of representatives not based in New York to today's *Journal of the United Nations* (No. 2004/189), where they will see an entry entitled "Informal exchanges of views on First Committee issues". That is a follow-up to the activity that our delegation conducted last year in an effort to improve our delegation's dialogue with all other members. Unlike last year, when we wanted to centre the discussion on revitalization of the First Committee, we view this year's meetings as being more in line with the Chairman's desire to increase interactive dialogue. Colleagues who are interested in that kind of activity may see it as an opportunity to "ask America": essentially, anything that representatives wish to discuss with us, we are prepared to discuss. Obviously, every regional group has been invited. All these activities will take place at the same time for each group during the course of next week.

We look forward to working with all members once we resume our labours formally.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Rachmianto (Indonesia): I have a question regarding document A/C.1/59/1, "Allocation of agenda items to the First Committee". How and when will the Committee be considering agenda item 109 (Programme planning), listed in section I?

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I do not have a final answer at this time. At yesterday's meeting of the Bureau we considered a number of options. It could be towards the end of the general debate phase or, most likely, before the thematic discussion. That would be the best time. But we did not take a decision yesterday because we wanted to coordinate with the secretariat of the Fifth Committee to identify the ideal time for consideration of item 109. I will provide an exact date once we have completed our consultations with the Fifth Committee secretariat.

I call on the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Stritt (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): With respect to the Open-ended Working Group to Negotiate an International Instrument to Enable States to Identify and Trace in a Timely and Reliable Manner Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, which Switzerland is pleased to chair, I wish to announce that Ambassador Anton Thalmann, Chairman of the Working Group, will be in New York from 18 to 22 October. It has been agreed with you, Mr. Chairman, and with the other members of the Bureau that informal consultations on the Working Group will take place on the morning of Wednesday, 20 October. It is our intention to conduct the consultations on the basis of a questionnaire, which we are in the process of developing and which will be sent to all New York missions before the middle of October. The questionnaire will be similar to the one we circulated during the Group's initial working meeting; it will relate to matters on which we still need input from delegations.

I should mention also that Ambassador Thalmann is open to any requests for bilateral meetings, and if any delegations wish to meet with him, either privately or in a group, I invite them to telephone the Swiss Mission to make an appointment.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): With respect to the 20 October consultations with Ambassador Thalmann, when the Bureau is in a position to issue a complete calendar for the thematic phase of our work, we shall propose a discussion on the broader theme of conventional disarmament, including the question of small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. Early on the morning of Wednesday, 20 October, and immediately following our meeting, there will indeed be time for Ambassador Thalmann to conduct consultations on the Working Group.

I wish to conduct extensive consultations on this subject; as I said earlier, it is my intention to invite experts to introduce thematic items. Here I will need the cooperation of all members. In that connection I invite all delegations to suggest the names of experts who could some of our agenda items in the format I have proposed. Such suggestions should take account of constraints in terms of both time and resources with respect to invitations to experts who are not in or near New York. I apologize for any inconvenience here; it would have been better to plan this well in advance, but it was simply not possible. Next year, perhaps it will indeed be possible, but this year we will need a bit of imagination and a lot of flexibility.

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.